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Communities of practices as means to develop creativity at work

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Background and purpose,

To cope with the frequent changes healthcare professionals must be creative. A Community of Practice (CoP) is a relational work community based on voluntary participation by practitioners of a particular work (e.g. intensive care unit nursing or maintenance of machine X) that interact and improve their practice. CoP are known for inducing a propensity to develop knowledge and foster creativity as practitioners interact and build relations, share ideas and discuss experiences.

Communities of Practice are often developed as a part of knowledge management initiatives. However, knowledge about how to develop CoP is still incomplete. This papers reports on an intervention study that contributes to the CoP field through the design and test of a method for CoP development within operations. The study contributes with knowledge about the design of a CoP start-up process and about connecting the CoP with the organization.

We propose a method to develop CoP and the method is tested in a blood analysis unit at 'Nordsjællands Hospital' in Denmark and the effect on creativity is evaluated. In order to develop the CoP the following interventions took place: The manager was introduced to CoP theory. The practice was operationalized narrowly as employees performing a specific operational task frequently and experiencing recurring problems. A voluntary CoP facilitator was identified and introduced to CoP theory. She then invited her colleagues to participate in the CoP. The facilitator arranged the start-up workshop where CoP participants were introduced to the timeline, the purpose of the CoP and templates to support collaboration. The facilitator arranged the following CoP meetings.

Design/methodology/approach

CoP level was measured at baseline and at follow-up (13 weeks after the intervention). Interventions were initiated just after baseline measurement. Process performance data and the procedure describing the practice were collected at baseline and at follow-up.

The 'Event Modifier Assessment Method' was used to control for effect modification by identifying events both part and not part of the intervention and estimating their effect on CoP.

After the intervention period the CoP development method was evaluated.

Results

The CoP participants had a creative collaboration and implemented improvements by drawing on their tacit and explicit knowledge. For example was the work process redesigned based on what 'felt' right for practitioners.

Discussion with practical implications (if applicable)

The study provides practitioners with an approach to organizing knowledge sharing within operations but practical circumstances such 24/7 production and changing shift patterns raises new questions about the viability of CoP in this is setting.

Conclusions

The method led to a CoP where creative collaboration took place but evaluation of the method shows that further research is needed. Also the questionnaire need further testing.

Keywords. Communities of Practice, knowledge sharing, creativity.